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SUBJECT: NEW SOMALIAN PRESIDENT SPEAKS ON CHALLENGES FACING
TRANSITIONAL GOVERNMENT

¶11. (U) SUMMARY: Al Hayat a London based Arabic newspaper published 30 October an interview with the new President of Somalia. In the interview, widely read in Djibouti, he addressed several issues dealing with his return to Mogadishu, the disarmament process, terrorism in Somalia and the African Union military peacekeepers. He also touched on his hopes for relations with the United States of America, especially on the issue of counter-terrorism efforts. End Summary.

¶12. (U) In an October 30th interview with the international Arabic paper Al Hayat, the newly elected president of Somalia, Abdillahi Youssouf Ahmed, reported that he will not be able to go back to his country's capital for the time being. He commented that it would not be possible until peace and stability could prevail. Factors that could prevent that from happening are the wide spread presence of arms and munitions in the country. He mentioned some 55,000 armed militia personnel, 500 military vehicles and some 20 million weapons of different size exist in Somalia territory. The Somali president explained that for this reason, he needed international support to disarm militias and fight terrorism in Somalia.

¶13. (U) On the issue of a possible terrorist presence in Somalia, Youssouf stated, " There are numerous terrorist cells present in Somalia and this is caused by fourteen years of not having a government and we're trying to do whatever possible to track them down. When asked of the possibility of relations with the United States, he said" I'll work with everyone helping with the reconstruction of Somalia and the establishment of peace in the country." He continued, " We suffered the most from terrorism because terrorists are spread all over the country. We know that the United States is among the first nations that fought international terrorism. That's why I see no inconvenience for me and Americans to cooperate in eradicating this danger from our region and the world".

¶14. (U) As Al Hayat reported, Youssouf said that the challenges facing the new government are enormous and they cannot be resolved while living outside the country. He said he would not go to Mogadishu right away but it would be possible to start working from another region in Somalia. "Somalia is not only Mogadishu", he said. In response to whether he would use Puntland as an alternate site for the new government, he said: " I can not move the government to my hometown. we'll choose another region within Somalia to begin the work". Regarding the timeframe of the new government return to Somalia, Youssouf commented: " I can not go to Somalia before I see the 30,000 peacekeeping forces I asked for from the African Union on the ground. I hope to see them in Somalia real soon".

¶15. (U) Regarding the topic of Somaliland and the future relations between the two nations, Youssouf stated" We won't have a conflict with them nor ask them to join us by force. All we need is to choose the right time to engage in discussions to reach a peaceful solution. I won't use violence even with those who opposed my election as president".

¶16. (U) Speaking on his relations with Arab world, he said" I am going to Cairo at the beginning of the month to see the General secretary of the Arab League and present my propositions

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regarding assistance and support to build a new Somalia."